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### **The Making of the North Korean State**

by

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## **Abstract**

While North Korea's official history emphasizes the indigenesness and autonomy of the North's state formation process, and while scholars outside present the North as a satellite or a puppet, this paper takes the middle ground and argues that the North's regime formation is best understood as the outcome of the interactions between Kim Il-Sung led communists and the Soviet occupation forces. The North Korean government of the mid to late 1950's criticized Soviet interference as 'modern revisionism' and set a principle of "let's do things our way." The Soviet Union criticized the North Korean measures as "anti-Soviet" and "promotion of nationalism," but the North Korean government was finding its own ideology, theory, and methods. North Korea decided to "not live today for today, but to live today for tomorrow." The North Korea also diverged significantly from the USSR and China, especially in its party structure and its leadership system. As a result, North Korea had a unique system different from those of other Eastern European socialist states. The historical process of the North's state formation shed light on why it did not collapse with Eastern European states or the Soviet Union.

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## Introduction

On January 23, 1968, the Navy of the Korean People's Army captured an American naval ship near Wŏnsan in the sea east of the DPRK's coast. The Pueblo, the captured ship, was a state-of-the-art 1,000 ton intelligence-gathering vessel, with a crew of eighty-three, that had been allegedly conducting electronic surveillance of North Korean military bases. In response to "one of the greatest humiliations in the 176-year year history of American naval forces," the National Security Council decided, at its meetings held on January 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, to take retaliatory actions and dispatched military forces around North Korea, only to later sign a document that apologized for its hostile actions and promised not to repeat them.

The Chosŏn [*The Korean Pictorial*], a monthly picture book published in Pyŏngyang, ran in its January 2004 issue a story of the Pueblo incident and emphasized that "the American empire should not forget the lesson of thirty-five years ago and should know the resolute will of today's Chosŏn." The Korean Central Broadcasting also referred to the incident, defiantly declaring that the "worst tragedy of America is that it does not know North Korea" and "in a confrontation with North Korea, America will only get disgrace and death." During the 1999 joint military exercises between the United States and South Korea, Pyongyang moved the Pueblo from Wŏnsan on the east coast, through the Korean Strait in the south, and up the Taedong River on the west to put it on a public display. The ship now serves as an embodiment of "living history" that reminds the North Koreans of an American threat and of an imperative to defend their country. The Pueblo provides the face of the other in opposition to which the North's Juch'e is constituted.

South Korea and the United States, however, have not yet completely shaken the "Pueblo nightmare." At the time of the incident, the United States requested that the Soviet Union use its influence on its erstwhile "satellite state" to convince it to release the captured crew and ship. But the Soviet influence proved a mirage, as Pyongyang stood firm in the face of Soviet pressure and American show of force. The Americans slowly came to the rude awakening that North Korea might not be the puppet regime that they had assumed it to be. Their rude awakening was followed a few years later by the publication of *Communism in Korea* where its authors, Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee, provided an antidote to the Americans in shock: Kim Il-Sung was not a mere puppet enthroned by the Soviets but a leader comparable to many other communists who had been active in the liberation struggle against the Japanese imperialism. Nevertheless the book, going only so far as to provide for a "relativistic" study, stopped short of tracing the DPRK's historical roots and post-war experiences to account for Pyongyang's defiance in the Pueblo incident and subsequent events. This, and subsequent works, fails to come to terms with the North that remains Juch'e, being the master of its own fate, independent of outside pressures and insistent on its own ways.

This paper seeks to trace the early historical origins of North Korea's political institutions centered around Juch'e. In the current polarized atmosphere that allows only a pro or an anti-North narrative, it is not easy to advance an alternative understanding of the division of the Korean peninsula and the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic

of Korea.<sup>1</sup> But two recent developments help the task. On the one hand, one can draw guidance from the emerging literature on the early periods of the DPRK, particularly produced by a new generation of scholars in the United States and South Korea, even if many still remain cursory and partial. On the other hand, one is helped by the opening of new sources, such as the Japanese Imperial Police records and the *Records Seized by U.S. Military Forces in Korea* during the Korean War, that had not been available but that now reveal a lot about the origins and character of the formation of the North Korean government. These documents have been ignored in many conventional accounts.<sup>2</sup>

Rejecting both the “sovietization” arguments – popular in the United States and South Korea – and the “self-powered revolution” thesis – advanced by the North’s scholars and official narratives – this paper articulates a synthetic perspective that the North’s state formation is best understood as the outcome of recursive interactions between outsiders who sought to exercise their influence to shape the North and the Koreans, particularly Kim Il Sung’s anti-Japanese guerilla group, who struggled to maintain their autonomy. The North’s Juch’s state emerged out of this tug of war. After addressing the period from the genesis of the Korean communist movement to the anti-Japanese armed struggles of the 1930’s, this paper explains the circumstances under which the anti-Japanese guerrilla unit was able to emerge as the center of North Korean politics and establish a nation in the midst of the international politics of cooperation and conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. To condense the discussion of the issues of the liberation period, this paper will limit itself to the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers and to *minju kijiron* [the democratic base argument]. Finally, this paper situates the emergence of the North’s political institutions in the still unexplored historical context of the struggles in the North Korean-Soviet relationship between ‘unity’ and ‘subordination,’ ‘autonomy’ and ‘creation.’

### 1. “Sovietization” or “Self-Powered Revolution”?

While some individuals who witnessed the establishment of the North Korean government after liberation labeled it a “satellite state” or a “puppet,” it was the United States Military Government in Korea that introduced such a perspective first. An American official as early as September 29, 1945 described the situation in the North as “sovietization”:

“In the meantime, there is little knowledge of the political actions or policies of the Russian occupation forces to the north. They have ejected the Japanese and set up local governments, which are strictly on a one-party basis. There is more than a probability that they will sovietize northern Korea as they sovietized Eastern Europe.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is the formal name of the state established on September 9, 1948, and is located in the northern region of the Korean peninsula above the 38th parallel (the military demarcation line in 1953). Of the 221,336 km<sup>2</sup> that make up the total land area of Korea, the DPRK has approximately 55%, or 122,762 km<sup>2</sup>. Its population in 2000 was 22,963,000 and its administrative areas consist of two government-controlled cities, nine provinces, one special city, twenty-five cities, and 148 counties. In June 2004, the DPRK maintained diplomatic relations with 155 countries.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Cumings, “Bring Korea Back In: Structured Absence, Glaring Present, and Invisibility” in Warren Cohen, ed. *Pacific Passage: the study of American--East Asian relations on the eve of the twenty-first century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> “The Political Adviser in Korea (Benninghoff) to the Secretary of State,” *FRUS* 1945, vol. VI, 1065.

Such a view was further strengthened by studies produced by U.S. government agencies and scholars. The Department of State, for instance, characterized the North's regime as a "Soviet satellite" in a study that was produced on the basis of the materials and testimonies collected in North Korea late in 1950.<sup>4</sup> The sovietization theory, which American academia had originally developed in the context of Eastern Europe, was systematically applied to North Korea by such scholars as Ho-min Yang, Dae-sook Suh, Robert Scalapino, Chong-sik Lee, and Erik van Ree, providing a conceptual framework within which individuals made sense of their observations.<sup>5</sup> The sovietization theory made it seem obvious to the Americans waging the Cold War that the North Korean government was not an autonomous actor and that the Soviet Union was responsible for directing the division of the peninsula.

Many facts on the ground, of course, coalesced to lend credence to the sovietization theory. The Soviet military advanced into North Korea at the end of the World War II, and remained the occupation force for a few years, steering the newly established regime towards a "Stalinist developmental model." From the period of anti-Japanese armed struggle, the North Korean communists led by Kim Il Sung had a past history of supporting the Soviet Union under such slogans as "Let us protect the Soviet Union with arms!" Furthermore, the North Koreans desired a new political system that was different from bourgeois democracy and an economic system that was guided not by market but by planning, not by capitalist profit motives but by aspirations to elevate the standard of living. As a result, the sovietization theory ended up the only and most convincing conceptual road map to understanding North Korea.

The sovietization theory, however, had a number of serious flaws. The North Korean government, to begin with, was not the same 'freight car government' as many governments in Eastern Europe. Not only did Korean communists have had popular support in the North but they also carefully maintained a distance from the Soviet occupation force from the beginning. Even in the ravages left behind by the Korean War, Pyongyang maintained its defiance not just toward its wartime enemy Washington but also toward its ally Moscow, feisty enough to earn the rare distinction of being labeled by Moscow, long before George W. Bush used the same label half a century later, "a rogue state – the last country with a Stalinist system and surely the most isolated country in the world." North Korea may be many things, but a Soviet satellite is not one of them.

If the United States, and South Korea, is gripped by the sovietization theory, North Korea offers an opposite view. Scholars in the North developed, from early on, the Juch'e theory that explained the North's regime formation in terms of indigenous "people's

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of State, *North Korea: A Case Study in the Technique of Takeover* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961).

<sup>5</sup> Oh Yōng-jin, *Sogun chōngha ūi Pukhan – Hana ūi chūngōn* [North Korea under the Soviet military government – one testimony] (Chungang munhwa sa, 1952); Special intelligence section, Public security bureau, Home Ministry, *Pukhan kongsan koeroe chōngkwōn e taehan koch'al* [A study of the North Korean communist puppet regime] (Minjung sōgwan, 1958); Yang Ho-min, *Pukhan ūi ideollogi wa chōngch'i* [The ideology and politics of North Korea] (Koryō dae Asea munje yōn'guso, 1967); Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee, *Communism in Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Erik van Ree, *Socialism in one zone : Stalin's policy in Korea, 1945-1947* (Oxford: Berg, 1989).

democratic revolution.”<sup>6</sup> The North offers its official narrative that the historical roots of the regime are traced back to the anti-Japanese armed struggle organized and led by Kim Il Sung.<sup>7</sup> According to the official rendering, the DPRK resulted from the “arduous march” carried out by the anti-Japanese guerrillas who had waged an armed liberation struggle independent of Chinese or Soviet communists. Outside assistance is rarely acknowledged as if any admission would compromise the purity of the indigenous, self-reliant struggle that founded and sustained the country.

The North’s official narratives, however, run into difficulties, just as American sovietization theory does. North Korean scholars do not provide the details of the actions taken by Kim Il Sung’s guerrilla unit immediately before and after it moved into North Korea for fear that such details could expose the limits of the ‘self-powered revolution’ theory. Nor do they discuss, for the same reasons, the influences exercised and the changes forced by the Soviet Union. The North’s official history betrays a well-orchestrated selection bias about uncomfortable facts, for example, the separate elections held in 1948, lest Pyongyang should be accused of having pushed for establishing a separate government, consolidating the Korean division. Furthermore, one often encounters the refrain that a gap between Pyongyang’s stated policy goals and actual results was bridged thanks to the individual genius of Kim Il Sung.

This paper seeks not to explicate the uniqueness of an individual but to analyze the social structure and the course of history that enabled the formation of the North Korean authority structure. In analyzing the establishment of the North Korean system, it is also necessary to avoid sliding into the sovietization or the self-powered revolution perspective, either of which places a one-sided emphasis on a particular aspect of what is inherently a complex process of interaction between divergent actors. The necessity to do so is underlined by the switch of positions between the two perspectives when analyzing the causes of the North’s current economic crisis. Scholars from South Korea and the United States, who emphasize the North’s dependence on outsiders, explain the crisis in terms of the internal problems of the North’s “self-powered revolution.” Scholars in North Korea, who underline the self-sufficiency in their systems, find the causes of the economic difficulties in outside factors. In order to develop a coherent argument, therefore, this paper seeks to go beyond such a one-sided focus.

In the early 1990’s, a new group of literature began to emerge that recognized both the forcible influence of the Soviets and the internal dynamics of North Korean society, synthesizing the two to explicate the North’s developmental trajectory.<sup>8</sup> This group of

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<sup>6</sup> Taking advantage of a national science forum sponsored by the Kwahakwŏn yŏksa yŏn’guso in September 1958, North Korean academics clearly changed their position to one of *charyŏk hyŏngmyŏng* [self-powered revolution].” An interest fact is that around this time, North Korean academia denied ‘cultural diffusion’ and endorsed the ascendancy of national culture or ‘historical folk studies.’

<sup>7</sup> Kim Han-il, *Hyŏndae Chosŏn ryŏksa* [Modern Korean history] (Sahoe kwahak ch’ulp’ansa, 1983), 196-197.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, vol. II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Suzuki Masayuki, *Kita Chōsen: shakai shugi to dentō no kyōmei* [North Korea: socialism and a resonance with tradition] (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1992), translation by Yu Yŏnggu, *Kim Chŏng Il kwa suryŏngje sahoejuūi* [Kim Chong Il and leadership-system socialism] (Chungang ilbosa, 1994); Yu Kil-je, *Pukhan ūi kukka kōnsŏl kwa inmin wiwŏnhoe ūi yŏkhal* [North Korean state-building and the role of the people’s

scholars accounts for the emergence of the North Korean system in terms of such external factors as the Cold War origins of Korea's division as well as internal factors such as Confucian tradition, Japanese colonial control, the backwardness of the Korean socio-economic structure, and the Sin kukka kōnsōl undong [new nation building movement] among others. Thanks to their efforts, the process of state formation from December 17, 1945 to September 9, 1948 is now better understood than before.

Still needed to further our understanding are the efforts to historically trace the social conditions inherited by the anti-Japanese guerrilla army, the chief player involved in the state formation. Still needed is a synthetic perspective that explains the North's state formation as a dynamic process where internal and external factors are caught in a recursive causal relationship. Such a need is highlighted by the failure of the existing works to explain the North's resiliency. If the North is, as they argue, a government established and sustained by the Soviet Union, why did it not collapse with the Soviet Union as many Soviet "satellites" did in Eastern Europe? How is it that the North, the supposed erstwhile puppet regime, now accuses Moscow of revisionism, calling for "a struggle against revisionism"? At the same time, how is it that the North, purportedly a self-reliant country, is so dependent on outside inputs as to see, in their absence, its agriculture collapse? Any explanation of the North's state formation must be able to confront these issues.

The North Korean people feared the Soviet army from the very first day of its arrival, and even the Korean communists maintained a tenuous relationship with it. The Soviet army arrived as an occupation force, and made it known to the Koreans by handing out orders and directives. It plundered the North's economy, threatening the livelihood of the average citizens, and it wielded its military power, endangering their lives.<sup>9</sup> While criminal acts committed by individual Soviet soldiers did not last long, the Soviet Union continued its expropriation of industrial facilities, for example, disassembling and shipping to the Soviet Union the electric generators from then Korea's largest power plant, Sup'ung, allegedly to collect war indemnities from none other than Japan. The size of Soviet expropriation can be inferred from a Soviet report that acknowledges that the occupation command directly controlled production at thirty-eight heavy-industry factories, shipping 8,535 tons of goods

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committees], Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Political Science and Foreign Relations, Koryō University; Chōng Hae-ku, *Nambukhan pundan chōngkwōn surip kwajōng yōn'gu: 1947.5 ~ 1948.9* [A study of the establishment of the divided governments in North and South Korea: 1947.5 ~ 1948.9], Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Political Science and Foreign Relations, Koryō University; Kim Sōng-bo, *Pukhan ūi toji kaehyōk kwa nongōp hyōpdonghwa* [Land reform and agricultural cooperatives in North Korea], Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Yonsei University; Sō Tong-man, *Kita Chōsen ni okeru shakai shugi taisei no seiritsu: 1945-1961* [The establishment of the socialist system in North Korea: 1945-1961], Ph.D. dissertation, Tokyo University; Ki Kwang-sō, *Pukhan chōngch'i ch'eje ūi hyōngsōng kwa Soryōn ūi yōkhal* (Russian) [The establishment of the North Korean political structure and the role of the Soviet Union], Ph.D. dissertation, Eastern Studies Research Institute, Russian Science Academy; Yi Chu-ch'ōl, *Puk Chosōn nodongdang ūi tangin kwa kū habu chojik e kwanhan yōn'gu* [A study of the party members of the North Korean Workers' Party and its lower organizations], Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Koryō University; Pak Myōng-nim, *Han'guk chōnjaeng ūi palbal kwa kiwōn* [The origins and outbreak of the Korean War] (Seoul: Nanam ch'ulpan, 1996); Kim Kwang-un, *Pukhan chōngch'isa yōn'gu* [A study of North Korean political history] (Seoul: Sōnin, 2003); Sō Tong-man, *Puk Chosōn sahojuūi ch'eje sōngnipsa* (Seoul: Sōnin, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> "Red Star" 1945.9.12; "Shtikov memorandum" 1946.12.6; 1946.12.25.

from these factories to the Soviet Union without compensation for the five months alone the report covers.<sup>10</sup>

Although the Soviet Union sought to establish joint ventures, the Chosŏn-Soviet Marine Company and the Chosŏn-Soviet Petroleum Company were representative of what happened between the two countries. They were a tool for the Soviets to gain control of the North's main industries without extensive investments and to supply the Soviet Union with northern Korean resources and products. Furthermore the Soviets even attempted to lease the three ports of Ch'ŏngjin, Najin, and Unggi in the same way the British "leased" Hong Kong earlier.<sup>11</sup> A majority of the loans provided by the Soviet Union was designed "to strengthen the Soviet's economic position in the North." In the end, the loans were used to pay for the expenses incurred by the Soviets to produce goods in the factories seized by the Soviet army and to ship them back to the Soviet Union. The Soviets did not pay compensation for the North Korean goods they took.<sup>12</sup>

The North Koreans reacted in a predictable manner. They shared an overriding sense of contempt, so much so that *rosŭke*, for the 'Russkies,' became a derogatory term. The feelings of betrayal and resentment provided the seed bed from which patriotic slogans grew and spread widely. One of the popularized slogans called upon the people to uphold their national identity: "even though we read foreign writings, our mind must be rooted in our own country." From the society-wide sentiment of resentment and contempt grew Juch'e ethos. In opposition to the Soviet other constituted was the Korean nation.

Such an ethos gained an institutional foundation in November 1946 when elections were held to establish provincial, city, and county people's committees. After the establishment of the North Korean People's Committee in 1947, the Koreans took a firm hold on the decision making power to express their own identity with little regard for Soviet influence. The shifting balance of power in North Korean-Soviet relations can be seen in the changes of the number of Soviet literature that was translated and published in North Korea.

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<sup>10</sup> "Survey report of production conditions in northern Korean factory operations and enterprises from November 15, 1945 to May 1, 1946," sent by Shtikov to Molotov, cited in Chŏn Hyŏn-su, "*Haebang chikhu Pukhansa yŏn'gu ūi myŏt kaji munje e taehayŏ*," [Several issues regarding research of post-liberation North Korean history] *Yoksa wa hyŏnsil* 10, 309.

<sup>11</sup> After the creation of the republic in North Korea, the figures responsible for the economic exploitation of the Soviets were removed from public office. A representative incident was the removal of Pomenko as president of the Chosŏn-Soviet Marine Company. *Seoul sinmun* (1995.3.27).

<sup>12</sup> Chŏn Hyŏn-su, 308-309.



**Table 1. Annual changes in the translation and publication of Soviet literature**

Genre	1946		1947		1948	
	Books	Publications	Books	Publications	Books	Publications
Marxism-Leninism	13	290,000	21	495,000	8	210,000
society and economy	5	120,000	125	2,000,000	40	425,000
Literature	3	20,000	26	340,000	9	100,000
science and culture	1	10,000	9	180,000	2	20,000
Total	22	440,000	181	3,015,000	59	755,000

Source: "Three-year activity report of the Soviet Civil Administration Bureau in northern Korea: 1945.8 ~ 1948.11," part 1, *Politics: the political situation in northern Korea from 1945 to 1948*.

The translation and publication of Soviet literature in North Korea was performed by the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party and the Choso munhwa hyöp'hoe [Chosön-Soviet Cultural Association]. The number of translated publications increased dramatically from 1946 to 1947,<sup>13</sup> but decreased considerably in 1948, as Table 1 shows. At that time, the Soviet Union was energetically promoting to the world the superiority of its socialist system, and North Korea was in a position to receive Soviet 'advanced culture.' The decrease in translation and publication of Soviet literature, therefore, reflected a fall in Soviet influence within North Korea. Also, the decline in Marxist-Leninist publications, combined with the fact that the Workers' Party had "a very small number of Marxist ideologues,"<sup>14</sup> provided fertile ground in which a 'Korean style' thinking or a national ideological footholds grew for the future.

The 1950s was a trying time for the North Korean people. Having suffered an unparalleled level of devastation during the Korean War, they were left with the unenviable challenges of reconstruction from the ashes.<sup>15</sup> Their challenges were further complicated by Soviet refusal to provide much needed assistance. The Koreans became increasingly resentful as they considered the Soviet's behavior as a betrayal in the face of a struggling North Korean populace. With Khrushchev's ascendance, North Korean-Soviet relations soured further. The Soviet Union utilized its great power status and exercised pressure to interfere in North Korean internal affairs. As Pyongyang resisted, Moscow accused the defiant regime of being a 'closed society' and an 'isolationist,' using the very same terms that the West would decades later to criticize the North.

<sup>13</sup> In January 1947, the North Korean Workers' Party banned the publication of the writings of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin by local party organizations. "Regarding the publication of Marxist-Leninist writings and Bolshevik Communist history: the decision papers of the twenty-first meeting of the Central Executive Committee of the North Korean Workers' Party, 1947.1.28" *Kyöljöng jip* (1946.9~1951.11).

<sup>14</sup> "For raising the level of ideological theory in party members and qualitatively improving party propaganda activity: the decision papers of the forty-eighth meeting of the Central Executive Committee of the North Korean Workers' Party, 1947.11.10" *Kyöljöng jip* (1946.9~1948.3).

<sup>15</sup> Cumings 1990, (293-294)

In response, the North Korean government in the mid to late 1950's criticized the Soviet interference as a 'modern revisionism.' Its opposition to the Soviet revisionism created the very momentum to establish the Juch'e principle of "let's do things our way." As a result, North Korea had a unique system different from those of other Eastern European socialist states. While North Korea may share some of the basic features of the modern state and some of the characteristics common to socialist states, its distinguishing characteristics resulted from its interactions with the Soviet Union from the early period. Only in the historical context of the North struggles against not only its "main enemy," the United States, but also its supposed patron, the Soviet Union, can one begin to understand its emphasis on the centralization around the leader, the "revolutionary achievements and traditions," its successor strategy, and the "art of leadership."<sup>16</sup>

## **2. The Emergence of the North Korean People's Government**

Modernity in Western Europe is characterized by, among others, the formation of the nation-state, the rise of capitalism, and the ideological formation of individualism and liberty. Modernity in the Korean peninsula, in contrast, has been marked by the struggle to achieve sovereignty from the colonization of Japanese imperialism, the formation of the colonial-semi-feudal society, and the ideological formation of collectivism. Because the Korean state did not result from a developmental differentiation process of a civil society, as Western European states did, the Koreans, both in the North and South, distinguish two periods of modernity: *kündae* for the colonial period of 1926 to 1945, and *hyönda*e for the period afterwards.

The North Korean state emerged out of the following three historical developments: 1) Korean communists' long-term movement to build a system of proletarian dictatorship, and particularly, Kim Il Sung faction's success in consolidating political organizations through the anti-Japanese armed struggle; 2) their international solidarity with the Chinese Communist Party and the Soviet Union; and 3) the Soviet army's exclusive occupation of the northern Korea immediately prior to the end of the Second World War.

### **1) The communist movement and the anti-Japanese armed struggle**

The political basis for and historical origins of the inevitable formation of separate states on the Korean peninsula can be found first within Korean communist movement. Even though the Comintern withdrew its recognition of the Choson Communist Party as a branch in late 1928, Korean communists continued their underground activities through such mass-based organizations as revolutionary trade unions and peasant associations. For socialist ideology was able to easily fuse with traditional peasant reform thought, while speaking for the laborers and peasants exploited by Japanese colonialism. Nonetheless the communists failed to establish until 1945 a clear central organization that

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<sup>16</sup> In regards to the North Korean power structure, Bruce Cumings stated that the peculiar political system that developed under the influence of the Soviet Union and China in the late 1940's did not substantially change for half a century. As "revolutionary nationalist corporatism," Cumings saw the power structure of North Korea as the biggest difference from past Marxist-Leninist systems. (Cumings 1990, 293-294) Other than indicating the "hermit kingdom" of the Chosön dynasty and the influence of traditional Confucianism as related to the "peculiar North Korean formation," Cumings did not engage in further analysis. Bruce Cumings, "Corporatism in North Korea," *Journal of Korean Studies* 4 (1982), translated by Kim Tong-ch'un, "*Pukhan ūi chohapjuŭi*," *Han'guk hyöndaesa yön'gu* [A study of modern Korean history] 1, 341-343.

would lead the effort to establish a new state. The communist organizations had played few roles in the struggle to gain sovereignty, but had only influenced the individual activities of the labor unions and peasant associations.

After the failure of the March First movement, the center of the independence movement gravitated toward anti-Japanese armed struggles, with the growth of militant activities by the early Independence Army movement, the National Liberation Army, the Korean Volunteers' Corps, and the anti-Japanese guerrilla unit of Kim Il Sung. Through its fifteen-year struggle, Kim Il Sung's group developed from the Anti-Japanese People's Guerilla Army to the Korean People's Revolutionary Army, emerging as a powerful political force equipped with the ideological foundation necessary for the establishment of the People's state power [inmin chŏngkwŏn].

First, Kim Il Sung was famous for his anti-Japanese armed struggle of the 1930's. After liberation, he was welcomed back to Korea in triumph as the "lode-star of national liberation" and a "legendary hero." The Kim Il Sung group gained its popularity by winning well-publicized victories such as the Poch'ŏnbo battle of June 3, 1937, while communists like Pak Hŏn-yŏng were not well known to the public because their activities had been mostly underground.

Second, because the anti-Japanese guerrillas began party activities as members of the Chinese Communist Party, and because after 1940, they were under the Soviet Far East Command, their activities were limited mainly to party building projects. But turning the limit into a virtue, they were actively engaged in organizing party cells in many local communities, which in the end expanded and strengthened their influence.<sup>17</sup> Unlike Pak Hŏn-yŏng who after liberation gathered his people and focused on the national center of Seoul, Kim Il Sung continued his practice of establishing his bases in the provinces to propagate his influence and to envelop and seize the center.<sup>18</sup>

Third, the anti-Japanese guerrilla unit had developed a more coherent identity than other political groups inside or outside Korea at the time. In particular, they had drawn a particularly strong sense of confidence from the fact that they had successfully overcome the brutal 'anti-Minsaengdan campaign'<sup>19</sup> and the 'Arduous March,'<sup>20</sup> and their confidence

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<sup>17</sup> Manshūkoku gunseifu komonbu, *Manshū kyōsanfun no kenkyū* [A study of the Manchurian communist bandits], 86.

<sup>18</sup> See Chungang ilbo t'ŭkbyŏl ch'uijaeban, "*Pirok Chosŏn minjujuŭi ūi inmin konghwakuk*" [If the Democratic People's Republic of Korea] vol. 1, 80-83.

<sup>19</sup> The Minsaengdan was a counter-revolutionary organization of spies and stooges organized by the Japanese imperialists in Jiandao, China in February 1932 to destroy the revolutionary ranks from within because the Japanese were alarmed by the growth of Korean revolutionary forces. From its inception, the counter-revolutionary nature of the organization was well-known and it was dissolved in July 1932 after it was condemned and rejected by the people. However, even after its dissolution, the cunning Japanese imperialists continued to give the impression that branches of the Minsaengdan had been formed in many places. National chauvinists and factional sycophants were deceived by the ruse and used the anti-Minsaengdan struggle against the extreme Left, which caused great damage to the unity of the revolutionary ranks and development of the Korean revolution.

<sup>20</sup> The 'Arduous March' [*Konan ūi haengun*] was the march of the main guerrilla unit in the beginning of December 1938 until March of the following year from Nampaitzu through the border region of Yŏnan and the

distinguished them from other communist groups. After liberation, they promoted their experiences as the ‘revolutionary character and discipline,’ elevating them as the normative standard for political groups vying for power, with far reaching consequences.<sup>21</sup> On the one hand, it led to factional fights because other communist or nationalist groups who participated in the national liberation movement<sup>22</sup> were not as highly valued as the anti-Japanese guerrillas and their early followers. On the other hand, it resulted in the tendency to rely upon and promote as the North’s power elites the graduates of Mankyöngdae hyöngmyöng hakwön [the Mankyöngdae Revolutionary School] that was attended mostly by the guerillas’ descendants.

Fourth, the anti-Japanese guerrilla unit had the experience of establishing a guerrilla base and forming a mass organization under difficult conditions.<sup>23</sup> As will be discussed later, this experience laid the basis for the “democratic revolutionary base” thesis [minju kijiron] that justified the establishment of a separate government in the North, consolidating the division.

Fifth, the anti-Japanese guerrillas used their guerrilla experience in the process of creating the Korean People’s Army. They first formed small units in the provinces and then integrated them into a single, large army with an official announcement. Although the anti-Japanese guerrilla unit made compromises with, and even concessions to, other factions, taking secondary positions in many government bureaucracies, it directly controlled the military under all circumstances. It made the tactical maneuvering because it had learned from its own guerilla experiences what Mao later popularized: power comes from the barrel of a gun.<sup>24</sup> The origin of the sön’gun [military-first] concept, commonly heard in today’s North Korea, can be traced to the practice of this period.

Sixth, the anti-Japanese guerrilla unit worked to establish the anti-imperialist United Front [Panje kongdong chönsön] with anti-Japanese forces from various regions including China.<sup>25</sup> Using this as a foundation, Kim Il Sung established a party activity principle to construct a ‘democratic national front’ based on a labor-peasant alliance, and developed original viewpoints to drive the revolutionary movement, such as “work is done by people,

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Amnok river. After suffering a Japanese suppression campaign, minus-forty degree weather, food shortages, and combat, the guerrilla unit arrived at its destination. The experience strengthened the unity and confidence of the rank-and-file.

<sup>21</sup> Han Chae-dök, *Kim Il-söng changgun kaesöngi* [The record of triumphal return for General Kim Il Sung], 50-53.

<sup>22</sup> “*Chungkong tongman tangwön t’üküi kongjak pogo*” (1933.10.25) *Tongbuk chigu hyöngmyöng yöksa mungön hoejip* [Historical documents of the Northeast Area Revolution] A (30), *Chungang tangangwan, Yonyöngsöng tangangwan, Kilmöksöng tangangwan, Hükyongkangsöng tangangwan* (Kongdong ch’ulpan), 17, 47.

<sup>23</sup> “*Tongbuk inmin hyöngmyöng kunchöng wiyöndo hoegi*” [The joint meeting of Northeast People’s Revolutionary Military Government Committee], *Tongbuk chigu hyöngmyöng yöksa mungön hoejip* [Historical documents of the Northeast Area Revolution] A (44), 432.

<sup>24</sup> From the beginning, the North Korean military was called “the successor to the partisan unit under General Kim Il Sung.” *Chosön chungang yöngam* [The Chosön central yearbook] 1949 (Chosön chungang t’ongsinsa), 86.

<sup>25</sup> *T’ükgo wölbö*. (Naemusöng kyöngboguk poankwa, 1944.11), 76.

but revolution is carried out by the masses,” and “revolution is not achieved by people’s social origin, but by people’s thought.”

Using the difficult fifteen-year anti-Japanese armed struggle to maximize the legitimacy of their accumulation of power, the Kim Il Sung guerrilla unit utilized these six features as the unique, internal operating principles of the North Korean government. In addition, the six characteristics provided the means for maintaining their centralized power and the mechanism for reproducing the partisan unit over the next sixty years.

## 2) Connections with the Chinese Communist Party and the Soviet Union

During the colonial period, many Korean were active in the Chinese revolution. In August 1930, Korean communists dissolved the Manchuria Department of the Preparation Committee for Reestablishing the Korean Communist Party in the interest of unity, and were absorbed into the Manchurian Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. The Koreans were judged by the Chinese Communist Party, who said “although much energy has been expended on the Korean movement in Manchuria from the past to the present, the harvest has not only been little but the ideological domain has been weak.” In particular, people associated with the “ML” (Marxist-Leninist) faction were not approved for installation in the leadership ranks of the party.<sup>26</sup> In August 1932, the Manchurian Committee of the Chinese Communist Party purged instigators of factional strife who were from the Korean Communist Party and forbade people in the mid-level leadership positions of organizations engaged in factional strife from participating in the leadership organs of any organizations beyond those of the lowest levels.<sup>27</sup> In comparison, Kim Il Sung actively held a public position in the Chinese Communist Party and was building his popularity.<sup>28</sup>

Kim Il Sung organized the anti-Japanese Allied Army and worked together with Chinese communists to establish the anti-imperialist United Front. The Chinese Communist Party viewed him as a leader who was “cool under pressure, clever, and an admirable commander.”<sup>29</sup> Chinese communist leaders, the Comintern, and Soviet leaders had a high opinion of Kim Il Sung. For example, Zhou Bao Zhong reported to the Soviet Army Far East Command that, “Kim Il Sung is an excellent military commander... among the Korean comrades in the Chinese Communist Party, he is quite superior. He can perform important duties in southern Manchuria, east of the Amnok River, and in northern Chosŏn.”<sup>30</sup> The experiences of Kim Il Sung and his colleagues in the Chinese Communist Party were widely applied in North Korea. After 1949, the ‘bonds of kinship’ continued to connect the Chinese

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<sup>26</sup> “Chosŏn kongsadang manju ch’ongkukjŏk pogo (1930.1.30)” *Tongbuk chigu hyŏngmyŏng yŏksa mungŏn hoejip* [Historical documents of the Northeast Area Revolution] A (4), 393.

<sup>27</sup> “Chunggong Manjusŏng wigan

<sup>28</sup> *Chŏngno* [True Path] (1946.2.14).

<sup>29</sup> “*Tongbuk inmin hyŏngmyŏnggun Cheigun chi saengsan kŭb ki palsaengjŏk kyŏngkwa* (1938)” [The establishment and developmental process of the Second Corps of the Northeast People’s Revolutionary Army] *Tonbuk chigu hyŏngmyŏng yŏksa mungŏn hoejip* [Historical documents of the Northeast Area Revolution] A (53), 311.

<sup>30</sup> *Chuhogan ch’io sinmŏkjŏk sŏn* (1941.7.1) *Tongbuk chigu hyŏngmyŏng yŏksa mungŏn hoejip* [Historical documents of the Northeast Area Revolution] A (61), 296.

Communist Party and the North Korean government.<sup>31</sup> Without the existence of the Chinese Communist Party and People's Republic of China, it would have been difficult for the North Korean government to seek foreign relations with the Soviet Union on equal terms, and then the fate of North Korea might not have been much different from those Eastern European nations that did not protect their autonomy.

On October 23, 1940, the Kim Il Sung guerrilla unit moved to the Khabarovsk area of the Soviet Union. Kim Il Sung directed small-unit actions in the homeland and in southeast Manchuria, operating from temporary bases in the Mt. Paekdu area and in the far eastern region of Siberia. While staying in the Soviet Union, Kim Il Sung met frequently with the commander of the First Far East Allied Army of the Soviet Union, Merichikov; and the military committee member, Shtikov. Kim Il Sung visited Moscow before the Soviet Union opened hostilities against Japan and met with Zhukov and Zhdanov, the supreme commander of the Soviet occupation army of Germany cum Soviet representative to the Germany occupation authority and the political affairs bureau secretary for the Soviet Communist Party, respectively.<sup>32</sup>

Meeting with top Soviet leaders and those responsible for practical administration was an important political step for Kim Il Sung to become the leader of North Korea. The Soviet Union directly approved the ability of Kim Il Sung and provided the means for him to control the political situation.

### **3) The Soviet entry into the war and the division and occupation of the Korean peninsula**

The entry of the Soviet Union into the war meant the destruction of the Japanese Kwantung Army and was one reason for the division of the Korean peninsula. An unresolved issue until now has been how to view the General Order No. 1.

In a personal, secret letter from Stalin to Truman, Stalin says "I agree with the contents of General Order No. 1 that was just sent. It should be kept in mind that Dairen is part of the Manchurian region. I suggest the following items be revised. 1) In the territories returned by the Japanese Army to the Soviet Army, the Kuril islands should be included in the decision of the Allied powers, 2)..."<sup>33</sup> Seen from this letter, Stalin not only wanted to acquire Dairen and the section of the Korean peninsula above the 38th parallel, but he also wanted the Kuril islands. Stalin had no problem with dividing and separating a Korean nation that had existed historically as one body.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Dispatched by Kim Il Sung, veterans of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army and 250,000 young Koreans participated in the liberation of Northeast China. Mao Zedong said that one of the five stars inscribed on the Chinese national flag symbolized the blood shed by Korean Communists. *Kim Il Sung* (Pyongyang: FLPH, 2001), 157.

<sup>32</sup> *Kim Il Sung tongji hoegorok: saegi wa tōburō* [Memoirs of Comrade Kim Il Sung] vol. 8, (Chosŏn nodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 1998), 441-446.

<sup>33</sup> "Choguk haebang chōnjaeng sigi So Mi Yōng sunoejadul ūi sōhanjip" [Collection of letters from the leaders of the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain in the period of the Fatherland Liberation War] No. 363 (Chosŏn chungang hyōngmyōng pangmulgwan chōnsi charyo), 263-264

<sup>34</sup> Petukhov, "U istokov borby za edinstvo i nezavisimost' Korei"[Origins of the struggle for the unity and independence of Korea] (1987), 13.

By looking at ‘Stalin’s order’ of September 20, 1945, it can be confirmed that Stalin was trying to install a pro-Soviet government in the north above the 38th parallel as well as participate in the occupation of Japan. Although the Soviet Union established a civil government in its ‘expanded area’ and placed a police affairs command in each region, it did not have the power to exert complete control.<sup>35</sup> In the formation of the people’s committees,<sup>36</sup> the Soviet Union confirmed “the direct participation of people from the communist party and the bourgeois nationalist movement” and united them under the “leadership of the Red Army High Command.”<sup>37</sup> Afterwards, the basic line of the Soviet’s North Korean policy was one of practicality as it approved the autonomous political activities of the Koreans. The result was that northern Koreans largely oversaw their own affairs without regard for the regulatory power of the Soviet Union. Although the Korean communists in the north followed a Soviet-style developmental model, they were nonetheless forced to pursue changes appropriate to their circumstances.<sup>38</sup> If this is the case, then we must reconsider how ‘external regulatory power’ was both flexible and persistent as it meshed with the ‘internal North Korean developmental mechanism.’

Let us examine the process through the Moscow Foreign Ministers’ Conference of December 16, 1945. The discussion topics for this meeting were the conclusion of peace treaties with Italy, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Finland; the Far East Committee and the Allied conference on Japan, China, and Korea; and the establishment of an international consultative system for the control of nuclear energy.<sup>39</sup> One of the smaller topics was the formalization of international recognition of Korean independence.

<sup>35</sup> In conjunction with the advance of the Soviet army, the military affairs council of the coastal military district established military police commands in northern Korea in the six provinces, in the eighty-five counties, and seven cities. “*Chubukhan Soryŏn minjŏngkuk 3 kaenyŏn saŏp ch’onggyŏl pogo: 1945 nyŏn 8 wŏl ~ 1948 nyŏn 11 wŏl*” [Comprehensive three-year activity report of the Soviet civil government bureau in northern Korea: 1945.8~1948.11] (Доклад об итогах работы Управления Советской Гражданской Администрации в Северной Корее за три Август 1945 г.-Ноябрь 1948 г.), Part 1: Politics, Section 1: The political situation in northern Korea from 1945 to 1948.

<sup>36</sup> The people’s committees were formed in late 1945 in the 145 cities and counties of southern Korea and the 70 cities and counties of northern Korea. When Japanese control mechanisms ceased to function after liberation, the people’s committees arose as a completely new form of sovereignty that was spontaneously organized by the Korean people in the center and in the regions. Yi Sŏk-dae, ed., *Sahoe kwahak taesajŏn* [Dictionary of social science] (Mun’u insŏ’kwŏn, 1948), 518-519.

<sup>37</sup> “*Puk Chosŏn imsidŏ inmin wiwŏnhoe taep’yohoe ūi kyŏlgwa pogosŏ*” [Report on the results of the representatives meeting of the North Korean Provisional People’s Committee] *Rŏsia yŏnbang kukbangsŏng chungang munsŏ pokwansŏ* [Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, hereafter called “Ministry of Defense Central Archive”] *Chu Pukhan minsŏ haengjŏngbu* [Civil administration in North Korea], index 433847, Binder 1. In regards to the division and establishment of separate governments before the December 1945 Moscow Foreign Ministers’ Conference, the American military government in South Korea likewise has crossed ‘the bridge of no return.’ Of particular interest is the so-called *kwado chŏngburŏn* [governing commission argument] in southern Korea that was proposed in October 1945. When the Moscow Foreign Ministers’ Conference agreed on the formation of a democratic provisional government, it was already unacceptable within the internal circumstances of southern Korea.

<sup>38</sup> Far Eastern Command, *History of the North Korean Army* (1952), 90. The following political slogan was created within this context, “Let’s live in our own way. Let’s fight in our own way. Let’s create in our own way.”

<sup>39</sup> Division of Historical Policy Research, *Handbook of Far Eastern Conference Discussions* (Department of State, 1949)

In regards to solving the Korea issue, the strategy of the United States was to propose a four-nation trusteeship where the superiority of the three (United States, Great Britain, and China) would dominate the one (Soviet Union).<sup>40</sup> The American trusteeship proposal did not recognize the political demands of the Koreans, while the Soviet proposal stressed the establishment of a Korean provisional government dependent on the Korean people.<sup>41</sup> In contrast to the political power situation in southern Korea where the right-wing was the base of control for the American military government despite its numerical inferiority, control functions in the north were working because Koreans were included in ‘the North Korean Administration’s 10 major offices’ and were subjects [rather than objects].<sup>42</sup>

In the end, the resolution of the Moscow Conference in regards to the Korean issue was formalized on the basis of the Soviet proposal on December 27.<sup>43</sup> At the least, the Moscow decision clearly showed two things about relations between Korea and the rest of the world. First, the vagueness of the Cairo Declaration of 1943 that Korea would be given its independence “in due course” was replaced with a clear statement. Second, it showed the direct influence that the United States and the Soviet Union would wield on the future of a single nation.

The Moscow decision was the departure point for the continual state of divided occupation between the north and the south.<sup>44</sup> By the time the conference was convened, the United States and the Soviet Union had already unilaterally implemented their occupation policies for a period of three or four months. Based on the previously constituted circumstances, the discussion of the Korean issue could begin because each side had already established a foundation for the implementation of their own policies. That is to say, while maintaining the façade of the wartime alliance, the two sides acted as if they were interested

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<sup>40</sup> The memorandum listed the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Declaration, and while raising the urgent issue of Korean division, it revealed a “belief that four-party trusteeship is the plan offering the greatest possibility for future Korean independence.” “Memorandum by the United States Delegation at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers” (1945.12.17) *FRUS* 1945 I (United States Government Printing Office, 1967), 641-643.

<sup>41</sup> *FRUS* 1945 II (United States Government Printing Office, 1967), 699-700.

<sup>42</sup> In northern Korea, the central government covered a three-stage developmental process of: 1) organizing and strengthening regional people’s committees, 2) establishing the ‘North Korean Administration Bureau’ [*Puk Chosŏn haengjŏng 10 kuk*] as a differentiated central administration organization, and 3) forming the *Puk Chosŏn imsi inmin wiwŏnhoe* [Provisional People’s Committee of North Korea] as a unified central government. Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee state that the ‘North Korean Administration Bureau’ was the first step toward the establishment of a separate state in northern Korea. They conclude that the Soviet Union led the division in the north. However, before the Soviet Union directed the formation of the ‘Administration Bureau’ on October 17, the United States had already proposed the “governing commission argument” [*kwado chŏngkwŏn non*] in the south. Depending on the scholar, the character of the *Puk Chosŏn imsi inmin wiwŏnhoe* has been ascribed various descriptions such as “essentially a separate government,” “a new communist state,” “central governing organization of northern Korea,” “a separate government,” “a separate northern government.” However, in examining previous scholarship, their descriptions do not reflect a difference of analysis but a failure to confirm the fundamental situation or drawing conclusions based on insufficient data.

<sup>43</sup> “Memorandum by the United States Delegation at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers” (1945.12.21) *FRUS* 1945 II (United States Government Printing Office, 1967), 721.

<sup>44</sup> In the memorandum of the American representative to the conference, the United States made it clear that “Korea is presently divided into two areas and is under military control.” “Memorandum by the United States Delegation at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers” (1945.12.17) *FRUS* 1945 I (United States Government Printing Office, 1967), 641-643.



in the establishment of a unified Korean state, but their real intentions were completely different.

In the beginning of March 1946, the United States confirmed its basic policy for the Korean peninsula. It said that, “the purpose of American policy towards Korea is not for Korean independence, but it must be to block Soviet control of Korea,” and “pushing a policy for the establishment of a strong anti-Soviet, pro-American right-wing government in the south is realistic and wise.”<sup>45</sup> In 1947,<sup>46</sup> the United States proposed to Russia that the boundary on the Korean peninsula be clearly drawn.<sup>47</sup> The intensification of the Cold War on the Korean peninsula through the Truman Doctrine and the transfer of the Korean issue to the United Nations presaged the tragedy of permanent division and internecine conflict. The confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union ultimately forced the establishment of separate governments in North and South Korea.

If the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers unambiguously displayed the international situation surrounding the Korean peninsula, then *minju kijiron* [democratic base argument] effectively expresses North Korean cognizance of the state of affairs as well as their counter-strategy. The North Korean communists were attempting to be active subjects, rather than passive objects in international relations.

At the beginning of his political activity, Kim Il Sung was not clear about the *minju kiji nosŏn* [democratic base line] but spoke in obscure terms. In a report, he proposed “even if only in the northern Korean region where the freedom of democratic activity is guaranteed, the urgent developmental task is to make northern Korea the base for Korean democratic development by laying the political, economic, and cultural foundation for the future Democratic People’s Republic.”<sup>48</sup> The sixteenth clause of the communiqué of the inaugural meeting of the Communist Party of North Korea alluded to the “unique character of northern Korea.”

In regards to *minju kijiron*, the debate among scholars about its character and period of adoption continued. The character of *minju kijiron* is now commonly understood as “the pro-division line of the Soviet Union and Kim Il Sung.”<sup>49</sup> Scholars still disagree however on

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<sup>45</sup> 740.00119 Control (Korea)/3-2246: Telegram “The political adviser in Korea (Thayer) to the Secretary of State”

<sup>46</sup> In the beginning of 1947, in a memo sent by the American Secretary of State Marshall to Assistant Secretary of State Acheson, Marshall directed Acheson to “prepare a draft policy to create a separate government in the south and link the Japanese economy to the southern Korean economy. 740.00119 Control (Korea) file, Box No. 3827, “Marshall to Acheson” (1947.1.29).

<sup>47</sup> In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in March 1947, Acheson gave a summary statement saying that “the line between the Soviets and our side will be clearly drawn” in Korea. U.S. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Historical Series, Legislative Origins of the Truman Doctrine (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), 22; Bruce Cumings, “*Han ’guk esŏ ūi ’panmijūi ’ ūi kujojŏk kiban*” [“The Structural Basis of ‘Anti-Americanism’ in the Republic of Korea”] *Yŏksa pip’yŏng* (Spring 2003).

<sup>48</sup> *Tang kŏnsŏl* [Party construction], 101.

<sup>49</sup> Wada Haruki states that *minju kijiron* is the line of “first, reform; then unification.” (Wada Haruki, “*Soryŏn ūi tae Pukhan chŏnghe ’aek* (1945-1946)” [Soviet policy towards North Korea (1945-1946)] *Pundan chŏnhu ūi hyŏndaesa* [Modern history before and after division] (Ilwŏl sŏgak), 283. Kim Myŏng-sŏp critiqued the reform from the *minju kiji nosŏn* as “*minju kijiron = pundan nosŏnron* [division line argument]” because of its

the period of adoption for minju kijiron. Wada Haruki points to December 17, 1945.<sup>50</sup> Suzuki Masayuki indicates the First Congress of the North Korean Workers' Party on August 29, 1946.<sup>51</sup> Kim Nam-sik, Chŏng Yong-uk look to the Meeting of the Five Provinces [Sŏbuk 5 todang ch'aekimja kūbdang yŏlsongja taehoe].<sup>52</sup> Ryu Kil-chaeh argued that the North Korean Communist Party was weak at the time of the minju kijiron proposal and could not even accomplish social reform. It was only after the successful implementation of the land reform that the concept became clear.<sup>53</sup> Yang Ho-min stated that it is possible that Kim Il Sung had thought of the minju kijiron at the Third Plenum of the North Korean Branch Bureau of the Korean Communist Party, but clearly proposed it at the First Congress of the North Korean Workers' Party.<sup>54</sup> It is interesting to note that there was no political party or individual in the south who seriously considered the meaning of the northern Korean minju kijiron at that time.

In 1945, clear statements of 'revolutionary base' and 'democratic base' were not well-publicized, but the situational understanding and strategic line of the northern communists were clearly predicated on the minju kiji nosŏn. The public expression of the stance taken by the northern communists was at the establishment of the North Korean Branch Bureau of the Korean Communist Party. In other words, it is impossible to understand minju kijiron without also considering the establishment of the North Korean Branch Bureau.

The fundamental program of minju kiji to establish the northern region as the support area and revolutionary base for the Korean communist movement was the national revolution line. At the same time, the purpose of locating the party's central leadership institutions in Pyŏngyang was a precautionary strategy against potential attacks by the United States or other emergencies.<sup>55</sup>

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localization in the northern region. (Kim Myŏng-sŏp, "*Haebang chŏnhu Pukhan hyŏndaesa ūi chaengjŏm*" [The issue of modern North Korean history before and after liberation] *Haebang chŏnhusa ūi insik* [Understanding pre- and post-liberation history]

<sup>50</sup> Wada Haruki, 283-284.

<sup>51</sup> Suzuki Masayuki, "*Chŏsen kaihō zengō ni okeru Kin Nichi Sei rosen – shiryō hihan o tōsite mita 'Chŏsen kyōsantō hokubu Chŏsen bunkyoku' sōsetsu to Kin Nichi Sei rosen*" [The Kim Il Sung line before and after Korean liberation – the establishment of the 'North Korean Branch Bureau of the Korean Communist Party' and the Kim Il Sung line as seen through a critique of the historical records] *Ajia keizai* [Asian economy] 30-2.

<sup>52</sup> Kim Nam-sik, "*Haebang chŏnhu Pukhan hyŏndaesa ūi chaeinsik*" [Rethinking modern North Korean history before and after liberation] *Haebang chŏnhusa ūi insik* [Understanding pre- and post-liberation history] 5 (Hangilsa 1989), 14-17; Chŏng Yong-uk, "*Puknodang ūi nosŏn kwa hwaldong*" [The line and activities of North Korean Workers' Party] *Han'guk hyŏndaesa* 1 (Pulbit, 1991), 172; Kim Chu-hwan, "*Sŏbuk 5 todang taehoe ūi taemi insik kwa Chosŏn kongsandang puk Chosŏn punguk ūi chojijŏk uisang*" [The attitude of the Meeting of the Five Provinces towards the United States and the organizational phase of the North Korean Branch Bureau of the Korean Communist Party], *Haebang chŏnhusa ūi insik* 5, (Hangilsa 1989), 171-172.

<sup>53</sup> Ryu Kil-chaeh, "*Pukhan ūi kukka kŏnsŏl kwa inmin wiwŏnhoe ūi yŏkhal*," Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Political Science and Foreign Relations, Koryŏ University (1995), 174.

<sup>54</sup> Yang Ho-min, "*Hanbando nŭn irŏkae punyŏl taedŏda*" [The Korean peninsula was divided like this] *Hanbando pundan ūi chaeinsik* (1945~1950) [Rethinking the division of the Korean peninsula] (Nanam, 1993), 94.

<sup>55</sup> In November 1945, Kim Il Sung ordered Rim Ch'un-ch'u to organize a Military-Party Committee for the border regions and to prepare a support base that could be used for emergencies and combat. Rim Ch'u-ch'u,

### 3. The influence of the change in North Korean-Soviet relations upon the formation of the North Korean political system

From the time of liberation, North Korea was already developing a unique political system that has continued until today.<sup>56</sup> In April 1946, Kim Ch'ang-man, the head of the Propaganda Department of the North Korean Communist Party, gradually began to use expressions in political propaganda that clearly illustrated the special characteristics of the North Korean political system that began with “the monolithic guidance of Kim Il Sung” and has lasted until today. These included, “the actualization of the inimitable guidance,” “the unique and unified security from mass guidance,” “establishment of the subject from guidance,” and “the perspective of the revolutionary mass line.”<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, North Korean academics continued to reduce the role played by the Soviet Union in the liberation of Korea and the construction of the nation. After the 1960's, writings on the post-liberation role of the Soviet Union were almost completely eliminated in the general histories of North Korea and the North Korean people were written into a central position as the subjects of national construction.<sup>58</sup>

Discontent with the negative judgments of North Korean academia on the role of the Soviet Union in post-liberation North Korean politics, the Soviet Union published documentation and memoirs, such as *For the goodwill of the Korean people* (1965), *The indestructible goodwill* (1971), *The liberation of Korea* (1976), and *For peace in Korea* (1985). They greatly emphasized the exploits of the Soviet people who participated in the liberation of Korea and in the construction of North Korean socialism.<sup>59</sup>

Let us examine the situations and issues that caused discord between North Korea and the Soviet Union. In May 1955, the Soviet Union announced the creation of the Warsaw Treaty Organization [or Warsaw Pact]. At the Geneva Summit Conference of the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union in July, the Soviet Union revised the unified Germany policy and approved of the “two Germanys.” In September, the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations with West Germany. Due to this chain of events, the North Korean government – which existed in a divided state similar to that of East Germany

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“*Chunŏm hayŏttŏn uri hyŏngmyŏng ŭi yŏ'myŏng'gi ro putŏ*” [From the dawn of our relentless revolution] (1)-(3) *Rodong sinmun* 1990.4.27~4.29.

<sup>56</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, vol. II, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 293-294; Kim Kwang-un, *Pukhan chŏngch'isa yŏn'gu* [A study of North Korean political history] 1 (Tosŏ ch'ulpan, 2003).

<sup>57</sup> *Tang ŭi chŏngch'i nosŏn kŭp tangaŏp ch'ongkyŏlgwa kwa kyŏljŏng* [The political line of the party and the comprehensive results from party activities and decisions] *Tangmun hŏnjip* (1), (Chŏngno ch'ulp'ansa, 1946), 66-68.

<sup>58</sup> Pak Yŏng-jin, “*Haebang 3 nyŏnsa e taehan insik*” [Understanding the three-year history of liberation] *Nambukhan yŏksa insik pigyo kang'ui* [A comparative lecture on understanding North and South Korean history] (Ilsongjŏng, 1989), 296-306.

<sup>59</sup> See Chŏng Yong-uk, “*Mi So ŭi taehan chŏngch'aek kwa kunjŏng yŏn'gu*” [A study of policies toward the United States and the Soviet Union and military administration] *Han'guk saron* 27 (Kuksa pyŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe, 1997), 14-16. The public stance of the Soviet Union was that it “caused the collapse of German fascism and Japanese militarism, and played the decisive role in freeing Korea, China, and the Northeast region from colonial oppression.”

– lost its illusions about the Soviet Union.<sup>60</sup> The North Korean government demanded the right to independently deal with its issues, according to its own convictions and circumstances. However, since a small country like North Korea could not easily win a conflict with the Soviet Union by itself, the cost of such actions could only rise.

Within the party, there were many people who looked only to the Soviet Union and who could not easily put aside their own experiences. They ignored the traditional cultural legacy of Korea and disregarded their own fighting experiences. In the field of scientific research, there were those who wished to accede to the demands of the Soviet Union. In education, much energy was poured into teaching Soviet history, geography, and customs. However, 1955 became a turning point. In response to the internal interference of the Soviet Union, some party leaders were assigned the role of levers and in front of propaganda agitators, Premier Kim Il Sung on December 28, 1955, made a public speech stating, “conquer dogma and formalism in ideological activity and stand firm in establishing *juch’e*.” This speech was a preliminary measure to protect the autonomy of the North Korean political structure when the *taegukjuŭi* [great power-ism] of the Soviet Union was penetrating through the *sadaejuŭi* [serve the great] of North Korea. The Soviet Union criticized the North Korean measures as “anti-Soviet” and “promotion of nationalism,” but the North Korean government was finding its own ideology, theory, and methods.<sup>61</sup>

After the death of Stalin, Khrushchev denounced Stalin as a ‘dictator,’ ‘despot,’ and ‘murderer’ at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, held in February 1956. The thirty-year reign of Stalin was described as a “dark period,” “a period of tyranny and terror,” and “a period of forced labor camps.” The image makeover of Stalin was directly transferred to the “Little Stalin,” Kim Il Sung. The Soviet Union also directed the Korean Workers’ Party to resolve the ‘cult of personality’ issue. As the ‘fever’ of expelling Stalinists swept across socialist countries, the Third Congress of the Korean Workers’ Party was opened in April 1956. The Soviet Union dispatched a group of representatives and proposed resolution of the ‘cult of personality’ issue, but the Korean Workers’ Party insisted on overcoming *sadaejuŭi* leading to a stand-off with the Soviet Union.

In the history of the Korean Workers’ Party, a unique meeting that discussed an issue that was not pre-programmed was the all-member meeting of August 1956. Although the plan of this meeting was to discuss the results of Premier Kim Il Sung’s trip to Eastern Europe and the reform of sanitation activities, a few party leaders led by Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik and Pak Ch’ang-ok questioned why the decisions of the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party were not accepted and opposed the policies of the Korean Workers’ Party by siding with the Soviet Union. The opposition criticized the administrative organs of the Korean Workers’ Party, the *chikŏp tongmaeng* [occupation alliance], and the leadership ability of the military; and questioned the line and direction of economic construction by saying, “the people’s lives are hard but [the government] is pushing for heavy industry” and

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<sup>60</sup> In October of the same year, Khrushchev called the national liberation struggle of the Algerian people against France an “internal problem” and forced the Algerian Communist Party to give up their armed struggle. After Algerian independence, the Algerian Communist Party lost its influence.

<sup>61</sup> “Loving and treasuring our own things is patriotism and *juch’e*.”

“food does not come out of machines.” However, these issues were connected to the aims of Soviet coordination of the North Korean economy.

The Council for Mutual Economic Aid (COMECON) was established in 1949 as the economic cooperation organization for socialist countries. COMECON established and developed bilateral cooperative relations based on trade arrangements, mainly between constituent members, and publicized the experience of economic construction. However, the Soviet Union raised the issue of ‘production specialization’ in the mid-1950 and sought to economically subordinate socialist countries through COMECON. While the Soviet Union was persuading North Korea to join COMECON, it was criticizing North Korea’s economic construction line as “nationalist inclination,” “isolationism arising from its socialist system,” and “building a closed economic system.” Although the unequal exchange between Soviet commodities and North Korean commodities was also a continual problem, North Korea continued to refuse to join COMECON, which was obviously under the subordination of the Soviet economy.<sup>62</sup> North Korea decided to “not live today for today, but to live today for tomorrow.”

At the National Agricultural Cooperatives Congress of January 1959, which occurred in the midst of the “transition controversy”<sup>63</sup> in socialist nations, the Korean Workers’ Party set its continual revolutionary task - even after the establishment of the socialist system - as the three revolutions of ideology, technology, and culture. While meeting with Soviet Communist Party Central Committee secretaries Kochelov and Andropov in January 1963, Kim Il Sung expressed his opposition to the Soviet tyranny of taegukjuŭi. In January 1963, the German Socialist Unity Party obeyed the Soviet Union and criticized the policies of the Korean Workers’ Party while publicly expressing adherence to an anti-imperial struggle refuting peaceful coexistence.<sup>64</sup>

In the 1950’s and 1960’s, the Soviet Union pushed its line and policies upon contiguous nations. For those nations who did not accept the guidance, the Soviet Union did not hesitate to interfere in those nations’ internal affairs and pressure them politically, economically, and militarily. North Korea was no exception. The Soviet Union said that if the Soviet Union had nuclear weapons and missiles, then there was no need for other socialist nations to expend their energy on strengthening their military. The Soviet Union discounted the need for even the self-defense program of North Korea. The Soviets talked as if they took responsibility for protecting North Korea, but the reality was that they were applying political pressure to a North Korea that was under their nuclear umbrella. In response, the North Korean government emphasized that they had the right to autonomously decide their internal affairs, such as the choice and establishment of a state socialist system, the preparation and execution of internal and external policies, and jurisdictional control over their people and land. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea stood against excessive

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<sup>62</sup> “*Charyŏk kaengsaeng kwa charipjŏk minjok kyŏngje kŏnsŏl nosŏn*” [Self-powered revival and the independent national economy construction line] *Nodong sinmun* (1963.6.12).

<sup>63</sup> The “transition controversy” argued that if a socialist system was established, an “all-people’s nation” would appear with the end of transition period from capitalism to socialism after the final victory of socialism. In North Korea, which differed from the *uklad* of North and South, this problem had to be addressed cautiously, as opposed to the international trend.

<sup>64</sup> *Rodong sinmun* (1963.1.30).

Soviet interference in their internal affairs that trampled upon their autonomy and sought a way to independently exist,<sup>65</sup> which was ultimately the emergence of a unique political system.<sup>66</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

The illegal Japanese occupation of Korea was the origin of separate states in the north and south. Within the Korean national liberation movement of the early 1930's that fought against Japanese imperialism, a generational shift was occurring that placed a new generation at the forefront of the movement. In the early 1930's, the armed struggle that was based on the Independence Army essentially came to an end, but socialists in their twenties like Kim Il Sung opened a new front in the armed struggle and initiated a qualitative shift in the character of the movement. The anti-Japanese armed forces that were fighting with the Chinese communists in Manchuria moved to the Soviet Union in early 1940 and received military training. The post-liberation division and occupation of the Korean peninsula by American and Soviet forces and the resolutions of the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers affected the Korean movement to regain sovereignty and establish a nation-state through internationally determined guidelines. In August 1945, the 'national contradiction' was fixed at the 38th parallel by the United States and the Soviet Union. In this divided state, the national liberation movement forces established power groups that would speak on their behalf to the foreign powers.

Consequently, America bears definitive responsibility for the division of the Korean peninsula and the establishment of a separate government in northern Korea. The American military government suppressed 'alternative political forces' and fostered political forces that could adapt to the system of division. The United States put the eradication of Soviet influence as the basis for their policies in the Korean peninsula. This method built the American-controlled southern half into an anti-Soviet, anti-communist 'island.' On the other hand, the Soviet Union was consistent with a temporary, passive policy towards northern Korea. Within this context, the People's Committee in the north had no choice but to develop a separate government through a central governing organization in the northern region.

After 1947, it was clear that the establishment of a unified, independent Korean state had failed. In the north and south, individual state apparatuses were formed under the guidance of the foreign powers. In the north, the communists took the lead and established the North Korean Provisional People's Committee on February 8, 1946 to serve as the central governing organization in the north. While supporting each political party and social group, the communists put the people in the forefront of social reform. On August 28, 1946, the

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<sup>65</sup> In October and November 1962, the Korean Workers' Party observed the surrender of the Soviet Union to the American blockade of the Caribbean Sea. In December 1962, the Fifth Meeting of the Fourth Workers' Party Central Committee confirmed the side-by-side build-up of the economy and defense and a concentrated effort on autonomous defense.

<sup>66</sup> In the present circumstances of people dying from hunger and the loss of common sense, if the reality of death rates for the elderly that are lower than those of children reflects the principle of the North Korean people to preserve their lives at all costs, then I do not know how the spilled blood of twenty million people who died to protect the first socialist state of the Soviet Union from the menace of the fascism in the Second World War is the valuable 'hope' of North Korea.

North Korean Workers' Party was established. On November 3, 1946, the first regular election was held on the Korean peninsula and resulted in the formation of the People's Assembly of North Korea and the North Korean People's Committee. On February 8, 1948, the Korean People's Army was established. In April, the Joint Conference of Representatives of Political Parties and Public Organizations in Northern and Southern Korea was held along with the North-South General Election of Representatives to the Supreme People's Assembly. On September 2, the First Supreme People's Assembly was opened and the Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea became the foundation for the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the successor to the People's Committee established fifty-years before.

The special characteristics of the North Korean political system are as follows.

First, the communists from the north and south formed the center of a coalition government that included political centrists from the south. Second, the north held the first regular, direct, and fair elections on the Korean peninsula. The south used the secret ballot and indirect election. Third, the North Koreans eliminated external interference, but the Soviet Union continued to participate in the background. Fourth, the north achieved the withdrawal of foreign military forces, which was a critical issue for national unification. Fifth, the government stated that its guiding ideology and policy was "progressive democracy" [*chinbojŏk minjujuŭi*], but it was essentially based on socialism. Sixth, the North Korean People's Committee relinquished political power to the newly established Supreme People's Assembly. Seventh, the North Koreans excluded pro-Japanese people in the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic. In the November 3, 1946 election, 420 people who were classified as pro-Japanese were deprived of their right to vote.<sup>67</sup> However, in the interest of political efficiency, the elimination of the pro-Japanese was not as complete as was advertised.

Present-day North Korea continues to use the state title of 'Democratic People's Republic of Korea' and sovereignty still resides in the 'Supreme People's Assembly' and 'People's Committee' as it did when it was established. However, the substance has undergone many changes. The ideological base of state formation was 'progressive democracy,' but through the process of socialist revolution, it became 'our-style socialism.' The character of the people's government also changed from 'the people's democratic dictatorship' to 'proletariat dictatorship.' In addition, the formative elements of the government were initially, the anti-Japanese guerrilla unit and its communist supporters that united with politically centrist groups, but now the government is centered on former laborers and peasants recruited after liberation within a basic framework formed by the anti-Japanese guerrilla unit and its second generation. However, a feature that will not change with time is the concentric power structure predicated on personal loyalty to the father and son, Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. The anti-Japanese guerrilla unit and its second generation occupy the center of the concentric circle. Around them are the party, military, government institutions, and social groups that, united by tight linkages, function to maintain and strengthen the reproductive structure of what had begun as the anti-Japanese guerrilla unit.

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<sup>67</sup> *Lebedev Memorandum* (1947.5.16).